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HOLIDAY CUSTOMS

IN

MALTA

AND

SPORTS, USAGES, CEREMONIES, OMENS & SUPERSTITIONS

OF THE

MALTESE PEOPLE

BY

V. BUSUTTIL
(Head-Master, Govt. School Vittoriosa)

MALTA
1894.

Printed by L. Busuttil.
34, Strada Forni.

With the Author's best Compliments

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The Author

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DEDICATED

(by permission)

WITH MUCH RESPECT

TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

SIR A. J. LYON FREMANTLE K.C.M.G.,C.B.

GOVERNOR

AND

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

IN AND OVER

THE ISLAND OF MALTA AND ITS DEPENDENCIES

&c. &c. &c.

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PREFACE

In these pages I have endeavoured to give a short description, and, where possible, the origin of the principal Holiday Customs, Amusements *and* Sports *of the Maltese people, which I hope will prove of some interest, not only to the foreign visitors who happen to be in Malta during the time in which some of these popular customs are being observed, but also to most of the Maltese themselves, for while the observance of these customs is perhaps no where stronger than in Malta, tradition as to their origin is scanty in the extreme.*

There being in our Island, as in other countries, an array of superstitions, beliefs and practices, I have also collected in this volume, in the hope of making this work more interesting, some of the principal items of folk-lore which have been handed down to us in popular traditions, tales, rhymes, and proverbs.

V. Busuttil.

Vittoriosa,
20th June 1894.

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NOWHERE has the legacy of antiquity so binding a force in the practice of to-day, nowhere is the saying "our forefathers did so" accepted as a sufficing and imperative reason for following, in most cases blindly, in the ancestral groove as in Malta, where the long memories of the ages stir darkly in the popular mind, and the associations of many centuries have accumulated, as it were, stratum above stratum, upon the soil.

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177 Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians,
178 Romans, Arabs, Normans, Germans, French, Spaniards, Aragonese & Knights of St. John have all been here, some for a short and some for a longer time, and they have nearly all left more or less their footprints on this Island and contributed their quota to the manners of the people.

The Maltese are as tenacious of the old usages and diversions, handed down to them from time immemorial, as any other people in the world. Although usage survives, motive, in most cases is forgotten, and as we will further observe the ideas of the older mythologies are sometimes altered to meet the exigencies of the new Creed.

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FEAST DAYS.

Most of these are made the occasion of general rejoicings in Malta, celebrated either by illuminations, feastings, fireworks or some other open air amusement. 527 796

The greater number of the holidays in Malta are in connection with the religion of the people, and are held either in honour of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, or of some Saint—as the titular Saint of the Parish or the celestial Patron of the town or village whose day is always celebrated with special pomp in each district.

Of all these *festas*, which are celebrated throughout the year with more or less enthusiasm, we only mention that which is celebrated on the 10th February in honour of St. Paul. 796

Great preparations are made for this day, to adequately celebrate this truly

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796 national and religious festival, which has been lately declared a general holiday.

796 This very popular feast is intended to
173 commemorate the greatest and most important event in the whole history of these Islands: that is, the conversion of the Maltese from Paganism to Christianity by the Great Apostle of the Gentiles, after he was shipwrecked on the shores of this Island A.D. 58.

796 The taste displayed by the Maltese in their festive decorations amount almost to genius, and they effect with the simplest means, what the most elaborate mechanism is generally required to effect elsewhere.

796 The front of the church, and the
373 principal streets leading to it, are always decorated with thousands of white and coloured lamps. Along the road large

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flags are seen floating, either from poles topped with evergreens, or from ropes stretched from house to house across the street. The balconies, windows and terraces of the private houses are also bedecked with many coloured flags and festooned with garlands of fairy lamps. 796 393

After dark the aspect of the streets of the town or village in which the feast is being celebrated is rendered still more striking by the multitude of variegated lamps. These are merely tiny cups of tinted glass with some oil and wick hung across and along the streets in a maze of graceful curves, but the profusion with which they are used and the taste shown in their arrangement combine to produce a magical result, the innumerable points of coloured light combining to form an illumination that is singularly brilliant and effective.

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[796] [541] There is also on each occasion a liberal display of fireworks on the evening before the feast day, with the usual amount of noise and glare, and several bands, civic and military, play choice selections of music to the great delight of the large concourse of persons assembled.

[346] [353] [794] The interior of the churches is always most beautifully and gracefully decorated for the occasion of the festival, and the inhabitants of each town or village are always vying with each other in contributing large sums of money for the purpose of decorating the church of the parish to which they belong. In most cases the feast day closes with a procession followed by the image of the Blessed Virgin, or that of the Saint who is being honoured, carried on the shoulders of some eight or ten men.

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Large crowds of people in their best 796
attire assemble, from nearly all parts of the Island, on the afternoon of the day of the festival, for the purpose of seeing the procession walking along the principal streets of the place.

When the statue is yet some distance of the parish church, the priests who take part in the procession enter the church, while a number of men and youths, carrying lighted torches, blue lights, and branches of real or artificial flowers in their hands, precede the statue up to the church entrance, amidst deafening shouts of "Evviva" the merry chiming of bells and the firing of hundreds of small bronze or iron petards, which are crammed to the muzzle with powder and stones to make the detonation more stunning.

Besides the procession which takes

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796 place during the year in the towns and villages on the day of the festival, held in honour of the titular or some other Saint, there are also other processions, such as that of Good Friday and St. Gregory's day, the origin and description of which will be given in another place.

Having thus glanced briefly at some local recreations of the Maltese which have connection with their religious ceremonies in celebrating the annual festivals in honour of the celestial patron of the town or village, we now come to the other usages and customs, which are observed by the Maltese during the year commencing from that of

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

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431 Early on the morning of the 1st. of January, groups of children may be

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seen perambulating the streets, throughout the towns and villages, each with a small oval-shaped wooden box in hand. 527 431

Every child you meet, in wishing you "Is-sena it-tajba" (a Happy New Year) implores the yearly mite, and this he does by shaking his cash, which no doubt consists of some few farthings or halfpennies, whose dulcet jingle, however, fills his little soul with joy.

The practice of giving "l' Istrina" (a small money gift) to these children, to domestic servants and to persons in an inferior position on New Year's Day is a recognised custom in this Island.

This making of presents on the first day of the year is no doubt of great antiquity, and innocent as is now the custom of giving money gifts to the children and servants on New Year's 527 431 191

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Day, it was in ancient times done by the heathen Romans as a form of homage to the two-faced *Janus*, the God of the year, especially honoured in that capacity in the first month (January), and the giving of "strina" in January was vehemently denounced by the early council of Auxerre, as an act of Pagan worship.

In the *Monthly Miscellany* for December 1592 there is an essay on New Year's gifts, which state that the Romans were great observers of the custom, even when their year began in March and consisted of 10 months of 36 days each, and also when January and February were added by Numa(*) to the other ten, the calends, or first of

(*) NUMA—a celebrated philosopher born at Cures, a village of the Sabines, on the day that Romulus laid the foundation of Rome.

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January, was the time on which they made presents, and even Romulus (1) and Tatius (2) decreed that every year *vervine* (3) should be brought as an offering to them with other gifts, as a token of good fortune for the New Year. 527 431 171

Tacitus (4) makes mention of an order of Tiberius (5) forbidding the giving or demanding of New Year's gifts unless it was in the calends of January, at

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(1) Romulus—the founder of Rome was the son of Mars, he was ranked by the Romans among the 12 great gods, being the founder of their city and Empire, and the son of the god of war.

(2) Tatius—king of Cures among the Sabines, made war against the Romans after the rape of the Sabines. He was murdered at Lanuvium B.C. 792.

(3) *Vervine*—a plant which has been connected with some of the superstitious rites of the Greeks & Romans.

(4) Tacitus—a celebrated historian born in the reign of Nero and was destroyed by the secret dagger of an assassin on the 13th of April in the 276th year of the Christian era.

(5) Tiberius—a Roman Emperor after the death of Augustus.

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527 which time the Senators, as well as the
43 knights and other great men, brought
171 gifts to the Emperor, and in his absence to the Capitol (1).

527 It is also the custom in some places
777 of Malta for men to go about strewing some lime in the door-ways on New Year's day. Some idea of good luck may perhaps be associated with the lime; there is no tradition, however, as far as is known, whence this custom arose.

527 New Year's greetings in the shape
203 of visiting cards, are very profusely exchanged on this occasion, especially among the better classes.

527 Groups of street musicians go from
43 house to house, either on the last day
533 of the old year or on the morning of

(1) Capitol, the temple of Jupiter at Rome built on the top of a hill.

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the 1st of January playing popular pieces of music, and this they do as a New Year's greeting. These men will rarely leave a house until some little gift of money is bestowed upon them as a remuneration for their trouble in paying their annual congratulations.

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ST. ANTHONY'S DAY.

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Among the popular Maltese customs in which animals play a leading part, that of the blessing of the quadrupeds of the equine species, in Valletta, on St. Anthony's day, is the most familiar.

On the morning of the 17th January (St. Anthony's day) a number of horses, mules, and donkeys, decked out in ribbons and tassels, are driven in procession in front of the Vittoria, a little

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796 church in Str. Mezzodì, at the back of
825 the Royal Opera House, where a priest standing at the door of the little church, sprinkles the animals with holy water as they pass by.

The same ceremony takes place annually at Notabile, where the animals are blessed by an Augustinian friar, at the door of St. Augustine Church. Here the quadrupeds partake of some barley which is placed in a tray for them.

796 In the time of the Order of St. John
825 of Jerusalem, the ceremony of blessing
195 the quadrupeds on St. Anthony's day was more imposing than it is in our days.

The first that took part in the procession, were the horses drawing the Grand Master's stately carriage, followed by every description of vehicle,

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from the gala coach of the dignitaries of the Island to the peasant's cart.

Very many inquiries have been made into the origin of the blessing of quadrupeds on this festival, none of which, however, has proved satisfactory.

That St. Anthony has been long recognized as the patron and protector of the lower animals, and particularly of pigs, is a well established fact.

Fuller, in his "Worthies." says: "St. Anthony is universally known as the patron of hogs, having in all pictures a pig for his attendant, though for what reason is unknown, except because being a hermit, and having a cell or hole digged in the earth, and feeding principally on roots, he and the hogs were both alike in their diet and lodgings."

When St. Anthony was living in the

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173 desert, away from the rumours of the
776 world, for the only object of serving God,
825 the devil tried all his means to tempt the old hermit and win him to himself—the Saint, however, always held fast and kept faithful to God. The fiend, seeing that all his efforts were vain, took to frightning and tormenting the good hermit. On several occasions he appeared to him amidst a flock of wild beasts. Anthony, however, was never frightened, he soon invoked the name of our Lord and signed the cross for help, and the devil enraged was always obliged to leave him unhurt.

796 This is probably the reason why ani-
825 mals are blessed on St' Anthony's day,
173 so as to keep off the devil from them, and thus man is less liable to be injured or hurt by them.

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CANDLEMAS DAY

This is a religious festival observed not only in Malta but in all other Catholic countries in honour of the Blessed Virgin on the 2nd of February, the 40th day after the Nativity of our Lord.

The word Candlemas is evidently derived from the benediction of the candles, followed by a procession, which takes place in the churches on the morning of this day.

Nearly every family in the Island is presented with one or two of these blessed candles—each having at the lower end, the image of the Blessed Virgin stamped in gold leaf, as a distinction from other ordinary wax candles.

These they receive either from the priests, or from some other person attached to the church, as a sort of a slight recompense, for the contributions

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796 offered during the year, for the purpose
794 either of decorating or repairing the
798 church or churches of the parish to
431 which they belong.
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It is also customary for every parish priest—on this special day, or on the day following—to present both the Bishop and the Governor of the Island with a
[643] two lb. candle. It is to be observed, however, that the candle given to the Governor is only a blessed one when he happens to profess the Roman Catholic Religion.

178 This giving of candles to both the
796 Bishop and the Governor—a continua-
354 tion of a custom that prevailed in the
793 time of the Order of St. John of Jeru-
431 salem, when the Grand Master was annually presented with a blessed candle on this day—is meant as a token of respect to each of the highest Ecclesiastical and Civil dignitaries of the Island.

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This festival is said to have originated 796
with the ancient Romans who, on the 173
night of the 1st day of February, went about the streets of Rome with lighted torches and candles in honour of the Goddess *Februa*, the mother of Mars.

In the year 684, however, pope Ser- 796
gius, anxious to wean his disciples from 175
the practice of heathen observances, and seeing that it would be useless to prohibit a practice of so long standing, turned the ceremony to a christian account by enjoining a similar offer of candles to the Blessed Virgin, and ordained that all Christian people should come to church on the 2nd day of February with candles in honour of the Virgin Mother of God.

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CARNIVAL

541 Among the several sources of popular amusements in Malta, the Carnival no doubt ranks first.

When the Carnival is about to make its usual visit, the dancing season, dinner parties and amusing entertainments begin.

541 175 This amusement, which affords a harmless outlet for the spirit of merry-making, was introduced in Malta during the Grandmastership of Peter Del Ponte in the year 1535. (*)

(*) Grand Master Lascaris, at the request, it is supposed, of some Jesuit fathers, gave orders in 1639 that no woman was to be allowed to mask herself, or to assist at any dramatic entertainment, on the 3 days of Carnival under penalty of being whipped. This order gave rise to serious disturbances and the Grand Master deemed it prudent not to interfere again.

Sir Patrick Stuart, Governor of Malta, determined in 1846 to reduce the Carnival by one day, not allowing any masqueraders on Sunday, the first day. This, however, led to a collision between the police and the people. The Governor, seeing that serious consequences would follow, let things take their usual course.

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Carnival commences on the Saturday preceding lent, and ends on the Tuesday following. 541

On Saturday morning the "Parata" opens the Carnival diversions. This consists of about 30 men of the lower classes dressed up, some in gay Turkish costumes and others as European warriors, all armed with wooden swords.

These men meet first opposite the Governor's palace, where they commence dancing and striking their wooden swords with great dexterity to the sound of music. The dance is concluded by lifting up a little girl, splendidly arrayed, and girded with a small dagger which she is taught to wave with one hand, whilst with the other she throws kisses in a very graceful manner. The companies then range through the city, stopping to perform their

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541 evolutions before the doors of the wealthy, to whom the little girl, who is called "Il gharusa tal parata" (the bride), is taken after the performance to receive some money as a remuneration for the trouble taken by the men, who employ the money they collect in defraying the expenses of the band, and the buying or hiring of the costumes they wear. (*)

541 175 648 The parata is a commemoration of the famous victory which the Maltese gained over the Musulmans in 1565.

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[171] (*) In Dr. Chandler's "Travels in Greece" page 133, we read the following passage which bears great resemblance to our "Parata":

"Some Arabian and black slaves who had obtained their freedom and were settled at Athens had a feast on the performance of the rite of circumcision. The women danced in a ring with sticks in their hands, and turning in pairs, clashed them over their heads at intervals, singing wildly to the music."

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In the afternoon of this first day of 541
the Carnival an extraordinary charivari takes place, especially in the streets of the towns of the Island. Troops of boys with their face besmeared, and clad in all kind of incongruous garment, parade through the streets with all sorts of instruments of noise, such as trumpets, drums, whistles and empty petroleum tin cans.

During the other three days of Carnival—Sunday, Monday and Tuesday—the streets of Valletta, of the three Cities and also those of the other populous villages, are, on the afternoon (that being the principal time of the amusement) always densely crowded with people to see the masqueraders walking and dancing about.

The rich dresses and costly costumes are no doubt to be best seen in Valletta.

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541 Here are always some well got up companies and perfectly appointed perambulating satires. Every description of wheeled vehicle follow in a regular train through Str.Reale, Mezzodì, Mercanti and Cristoforo. The occupants of these hired vehicles engage mostly in pelting the bystanders, who will enter the list with them. The balconies of the houses are crowded with numerously gaily dressed spectators; the streets below are thronged with gay parties of pedestrians mingled with those clad in every variety of costume that fancy can suggest, and one and all play every imaginable sort of prank. The throwing of confits in the three days of Carnival has greatly increased lately especially in Valletta. Groups of ladies, and gentlemen engage in a warfare with a tiny sort of *confetti*; it is not uncommon, however, that some

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big confits are thrown by some evil disposed person, and in such a manner, as to cause injury; in fact the Police authorities issue, every year, notifications warning persons against the throwing of hard substances. 541

On Monday the Governor of the Island gives a fancy dress ball at the Palace, which is always very numerously attended. Some of the costumes worn on this night are indeed magnificent, and the noble marble palace halls and corridors, once thronged by the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, present a truly picturesque appearance. A list of the persons present and the costumes worn is annually published in some of the local papers. 541 643

The Carnival is supposed to have been originally instituted in imitation of the Sigillaria or festival days added 541 173 177

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541 173 177 to the ancient Saturnalia (*) and was condemned by the Synod of Trullus, where it was decreed that the days called the Calends should entirely be stripped of their ceremonies, and that the faithful should no longer observe them; that the public dancing of women should cease as being the occasion of much harm and ruin, and as being invented and observed in honour of the Gods of the heathens and therefore quite averse to the Christian life.

541 174 179 The author of "Convivial Antiquities," speaking about the ancient Saturnalia, says: that on this occasion there were

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(*). Saturnalia, festivals in honour of *Saturno*, celebrated in Rome about the middle of December. The celebration, which continued for 3 or more days, was remarkable for the liberty which universally prevailed. The slaves were permitted to ridicule their masters and to speak with freedom upon every subject.

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[177]

frequent and luxurious feastings amongst friends, and changes of dress made, and the Christians have adopted the same customs.

He added, that as the heathens had their Saturnalia in December, Lupercalia and Baccanalia (*) in February, so amongst Christians three months are

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(*) Lupercalia, a yearly festival observed at Rome on the 15th of February in honour of *Pan* the God of Shepherds. It was usual to sacrifice two goats and a dog. The skins of the victims were cut into throngs, with which whips were made for the youths. With these whips the youths ran about the streets, almost naked, and whipped freely all those whom they met.

Baccanalia, festivals in honour of *Bacchus* (God of vintage, and of wine drinkers) at Rome—during the time of the celebration, the Romans clothed themselves in fawns' skins, fine linen and mitres; they carried "thyrsi" drums, pipes and flutes and crowned themselves with garlands of ivy, vine, fir &c. In this manner both sexes joined in the solemnity and ran about the streets nodding their heads dancing in ridiculous postures, and filling the air with hideous shrieks and shouts.

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541 spent in feastings and revelling of every
174 kind.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

796 In the afternoon of this day, which
783 is known by the name of "Hadd in-nies" (the people's Sunday), immense crowds of people, from all parts of the Island, flock to casal Zabbar, in their best Sunday finery, for the purpose of saying some prayers before our Lady of Graces (tal Grazia) in the pari-h Church of the village, as an atonement of the follies committed on the Carnival days, After paying the visit the people go out of the church parading the streets.

796 The numerous shops of the said vil-
265 lage are pretty well got up for this occasion. Stews, ham, cheesecakes, and other viands are profusely supplied for

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those, who, either from the effect of the country walk, or from the smells emanating from the cooked rabbits and fried sausages, feel inclined to go in and partake of the tempting dishes. 796 265

The crowd of visitors keep on promenading along the streets of the village till little before sunset. At the *Angelus*, the Zabbar visitors are on their way home, and the inhabitants of the village, are left peacefully alone to remove the chairs and tables prepared for their friends and relations. 796

HOLY THURSDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY

796 785

These two days of Holy Week—the end of the Penitential season—are days of solemn and melancholy ceremonial in Malta and observed as days of rigid

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796 [785] fast, being sacred as a commemoration of the crucifixion of our Lord.

The Churches are covered with black hangings, all the altars stripped of their ornaments, and all the bells are kept silent in token of deep mourning.

The people assist in crowds at the most imposing services which take place in all the principal churches on these days.

On Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), from about 1 p.m. till very late at night, the towns, Notabile and the other thickly populated centres of Malta, present a very striking scene.

Hundreds, from every rank and class of the people, generally in couples or in groups, are seen most devoutly performing the visit to the churches, reciting prayers all the time as they move from one church to another.

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Good Friday is kept as a day of general mourning. All business is suspended, and no holdings of public proceedings take place upon this day. The churches are all crowded, especially in the adoration of the Cross which, no doubt, is the most striking ceremony of Good Friday. 796

In the afternoon, after a three hours sermon, or meditation upon the seven words uttered by our Redeemer before his dying for us on the Cross, large crowds of people assemble on each side of the streets of Valletta, the three Cities, Notabile, and most of the villages to see the processions which are intended to commemorate the passion and death of our Saviour.

In these processions several life-sized images, representing the principal events of the Crucifixion, are carried through

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796 the main streets, attended by scores of *fratelli*, or members of the fraternity of the Crucifix, who are entirely covered in white or dark brown garments, and by the clergy of the parish, chanting as they follow the statues carried before them at equal distances in the procession. At the end of each of these processions a gorgeous bed is carried, covered with a canopy hung with rich embroidered curtains on which a life-sized figure of our Redeemer is stretched.

After traversing several of the streets, the procession re-enters the church and every body goes quietly home.

HOLY SATURDAY
or
EASTER EVE

The service of Holy Saturday is signalized by the Benediction of the paschal

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Candle and the solemn chanting of the 796
"*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*" which is the signal for the uncovering of the Church pictures, which had been covered during the two preceding weeks, and the simultaneous ringing of all the Church bells which were kept hushed in token of mourning during the two preceding days.

General rejoicings now commence, and Easter greetings are profusely exchanged amongst all classes of the people.

Peculiar custom prevails in Valletta 796
and Vittoriosa on Easter Eve. Just 533
at sunset, two or three men, one with 184
a big drum and the others with fifes, playing a merry tune, go about the streets, followed by large crowds of men, among whom noisy bands of lads, who keep rushing and pushing wildly all

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796 the time through the spectators, each
533 adding his quota to the universal cla-
184 mour. Everything, however, is done in perfect good humour and no one dreams either of giving or taking offence. (*)

EASTER

796 Very early on Easter Sunday, before daylight, there is, in each town and in some of the villages of Malta, a procession with the image representing the Resurrection of our Lord.

The most popular of these processions is undoubtedly that of Valletta.

Large crowds of people assemble, as

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[97] (*) The Greeks celebrate the feast of Easter with singing and shouting in honour of the Resurrection --with crakling of a large bonfire on Easter evening and on Easter morning before daybreak.
(Brand's "Popular Antiquities").

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early as 2 o'clock in the morning, round the door of the Catholic Greek Church, in Strada Vescovo, whence the procession starts.

At about 3 a.m. the procession—which consists of a number of young men carrying lighted lamps in their hands, led by the "*Papas*" and followed by the image—proceeds through some of the principal streets of Valletta, amidst the joyful acclamations of thousands of people who flock there from almost all parts of the Island.

When the procession arrives at the small church of Vittoria (at the back of the Royal Opera House) the bearers of the image halt for a while; all at once the way is cleared and a general run is taken with the image as far as the walls of the city.

This run is repeated three or four

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796 times at different parts of the town; the best run, however, which is mostly enjoyed, both by the spectators and the carriers of the statue, is that which takes place at the lower end of Strada Reale on the hill opposite St. Catherine's Church and Convent.

Here large crowds of men are seen ready to help the bearers in the run with the heavy statue up the hill.

After traversing several other streets, the image is deposited in the same church from which it started.

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EASTER EGGS &c.

The custom of eating and presenting *figolli* and round cheese cakes *(kassatat)* is as prevalent in Malta, at Easter, as it is in any other town or country of Italy.

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Maltese children look forward with great anxiety to get either from their parents, or from some friend or relative, a *figolla* at Easter. 796 262 431

The *figolla* consists of a bit of flat baked dough, cut in the shape of a woman, a turk, an eagle, a horse, a star, or a basket, with one or more eggs, having the shell stained red, or some other colour, embedded in its centre and fixed in position by cross bands of paste.

This characteristic rite of Paschal or Easter eggs is most widely diffused. 796 262

The universal connection of eggs with Eastertide does not seem to rest on any Christian symbolism. This popular observance is clearly of pagan origin. 171 174

In pagan imagery the egg was assigned to *Astarte*—the Phœnician Venus—as an emblem of the fructifying

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796 forces of nature, and may thus have
262 come to be associated with April, the
171 month held sacred to *Aphroditis* (*), in
174 or near which Easter falls.

We are told that the Jews used eggs in the feast of the Passover, and that when the Persians keep the festival of the Solar New Year (in March) they mutually present each other with coloured eggs. There can be little doubt, however, that the use of eggs at this season was originally symbolical of the revivification of nature, that is, the springing forth of life in spring.

A writer, in the "Gentlemen's Magazine" for July 1783, supposes the Easter egg to be an emblem of the Resurrection of our Lord—in the same manner, as the chicken entombed, as

(*) The Grecian name of Venus

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it were, in the egg, in due time bursts its shell and springs forth to life. 796 262 174 171

Hutchinson (History of Northumberland) says: Eggs were held by the Egyptians as a sacred emblem of the renovation of mankind after the deluge.

The Jews adopted it to suit the circumstances of their History as a type of their departure from the land of Egypt, and it was used in the feast of Passover as a part of the furniture of the table with the Paschal Lamb.

The Christians have certainly used it on this day, containing as it does the elements of future life, as an emblem of the Resurrection. It seems that these eggs were decorated for a religious trophy after the days of lent, which are days of mortification and abstinence.

We know also that the Jews in ce-

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796 lebrating their Passover, placed on the
262 table two unleavened cakes called "pass-
171 over cakes" (*) with hard boiled eggs
174 bound in with slips of paste cross ways on them (†)

Hyde, in his "Oriental Sports" says that the Christians buy eggs at Easter and stain them with a red colour, in memory of the blood of Christ shed for us at the time of the Crucifixion.

That the Roman Catholic Church has considered eggs as emblematical of the Resurrection may be gathered from the Ritual.

St. GREGORY'S DAY
General procession

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793 This very popular feast, which takes place on the first Wednesday after

(*) The *figolla*.
(†) Brand's "Popular Antiquities."

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Easter, is celebrated by a general procession composed of the fraternities and Clergy of all the parishes of the Island, led by the Chapter of the Cathedral followed by His Grace the Bishop of the Diocese. 796 [793]

The solemn chiming of the bells of all the parishes in the Island at sunset, on the day before, and the lighting of a large fire on the top of Cathedral church at Notabile, about 10 at night, warns the faithful to gather early on the following morning (Wednesday) in their respective parish church to start for the annual procession. [202]

At about 7 o'clock in the morning, Casal Paula is literally thronged with thousands of people from all parts of the Island, awaiting instructions as to the marching and ordering of the grand procession.

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796 A person, then, appointed by the Bishop, reads out the parishes to march in the order of their seniority. This done, the cross-bearers of all the parishes walk, following each other, to the Parish Church at Tarxien—some 10 minutes walk from Casal Paula — where they join their respective fraternities and clergy, and start for Zeitun — about a mile and a half from Tarxien—each Company walking behind their standard bearer, joining in the response of the Litany of the Saints which is pronounced by one of the priests of each parish.

On arriving at Zeitun, after passing through the parish Church of St. Catherine, were the standard bearers in the procession, by way of salute, wave their standards three or four times before the high altar, the procession proceeds

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to the old church of St. Gregory which 796
is at the end of the village.

The waving of the standards is renewed here with more excitement; in fact, large crowds assemble round the environs of this small church to witness the daring feats of some of the brawny countrymen standard-bearers, who, although encircled by half a dozen or more policemen, who try to prevent them from waving the standard, (*) succeed in doing so to the great delight of the enthusiastical crowd.

When the clergy of each parish enters this church, they kneel down before the altar of St. Gregory and exclaim aloud for three times "Misericordia." One of

(*) The reason the police interfere is, that on several occasions accidents have happened through the breaking of the flag-staffs

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796 the Canons of the Cathedral then says mass and the ceremony is over.

At the conclusion of this procession there is a scene of general confusion throughout the whole village of Zeitun. Priests, friars, *fratelli*, cross and standard-bearers, men and women of all classes, especially country people, and of these unfailingly the most recently married couples—all in their best attire and with a grand display of jewels and gold (*)—are seen going to and fro, buying and eating sweetmeats [493] and cheese cakes. Then again hundreds of all sorts of vehicles, from His

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[675] [584] (*) Till lately, young women residing in the country insisted before they were married on its being particularly stipulated in the marriage contract, that their husbands should take them to Casal Zeitun on St. Gregory's day, to Valletta on St. John's day, and to Boschetto on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, on the 29th of June.

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Grace's carriage to the commonest donkey cart, keep moving through the merry crowds, in search of their occupants. 796 [493]

Most of the people, however, who take part in this general procession, either stop at Zeitun, or proceed to Marsascirocco — a watering place at some distance from that village—where they spend the remainder of the day in merry making.

Round cheese cakes, *kassatât*, is the most common edible connected with this day, and from early morning, the whole day long, the shrill cries uttered by the innumerable vendors of the cakes may be heard throughout the village. 796 262 265

A few remarks about the origin of this procession will be interesting. 796 174

Many and various are the opinions as regards that origin.

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796 Abela, in his "History of Malta"
174 says: that it was instituted as a vow to
[731] St. Gregory, to whose intercession the Maltese had recourse in 1519, when the Island was visited by an epidemic disease.

Ciantar, the celebrated Historian, assures us, however, that the procession was instituted in 1400 long before the epidemic mentioned by Abela.

[648] Others again say: that it was held about the year 1429 whilst the Island was being besieged by some 18000 Moors, but this could not possibly be the case in as much as the people who were besieged within the walls of the town could not join in the cry "Misericordia" at Zeitun.

[731] Again some say that the procession took place for the first time in Malta in thanksgiving to the Almighty after

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the deliverance from a large swarm of locusts that once caused a dreadful havoc in the Island.

Monsignor Duzina, the Apostolic Visitor, who visited Malta in February 1575, having found that the origin of this procession was involved in great obscurity, caused the most aged men of the Island to be brought before him, and on asking them about the origin of the institution of this general procession, he was informed that the tradition was "That the procession was founded by a general vow of the Maltese after their deliverance from the Turks, whose fleet was dispersed by a terrible storm at Marsascirocco,(*) just when the Moslems were on the point

(*) This is probably the reason that the general procession goes to the churches of St. Catherine and St. Gregory, those being the nearest churches to Marsascirocco.

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796 of effecting a landing on the shores of
174 the Island.
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[782] It is an undeniable fact that the procession has been instituted in commemoration of some signal public deliverance. Of all the traditions, however, the most generally received is that which we read in the acts of the said Mons. Duzina's visit in 1575.

796 This procession used formerly to take place in lent, on St. Gregory's day, which falls on the 12th of March. That day was selected not because the above mentioned invasion occurred on that particular day, but because lent being the time of penance, our faithful forefathers thought that the vow would be more acceptable to God in lent. And the day of St. Gregory was chosen, that Saint being the founder of all processions which are solemnized by the Roman Catholic Church.

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ALL FOOLS' DAY

1st. April

This particular day has been selected for playing off little tricks whereby ridicule may be fixed upon unguarded persons, especially the younger sort. 527 522

The favourite jest in Malta, on the 1st. day of April, is to send some one upon an errand for something grossly nonsensical, who is sent home in a state of bewilderment as to what the affair means. The joke is carried so far as to send letters making appointments in the name of persons who, it is well known, must be absent from the house at the time fixed upon, and the laugh is always in proportion to the trouble given.

When the person falls into the snare the term "Leuuel ta April" (the first

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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527 of April) which amounts to "April
522 fool" is applied with laughter.

527 The custom of sending one upon a
522 bootless errand on the 1st. of April is
174 perhaps a travesty of the sending hither and thither of our Lord from Annas to Caiphas, and from Pilate to Herod. It is possible, however, that it may be a relic of some old heathen festival.

It is conjectured that April day is celebrated as part of the festivity of the New Year. That day used to be kept on the 25th of March, and it is certain that the commencement of the New Year, at whatever time that was supposed to be, was always esteemed a high festival, and this was the case both amidst the ancient Romans and with us. Now great festivals were usually attended with an octave—that

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is, they were wont to continue for 8 days, whereof the first and last were the principal; and you will find the 1st. of April the octave of the 25th of March, and the close or ending consequently of the feast. Hence it is supposed that the 1st. day of April became a day of extraordinary mirth and festivity, especially among the lower classes who are apt to pervert and make a bad use of institutions, which at first might have been very laudable in themselves.

A writer in "Poor Robin's Almanac" for 1760, gives the following metrical description of the modern fooleries on the 1st. of April, with the open avowal of being ignorant of their origin.

"The 1st. of April some do say
Is set apart for all Fools' day,
But why the people call it so

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Nor I nor they themselves do know.
But on this day are people sent,
On purpose for pure merriment,
And though the day is known before
Yet frequently there is great store
Of these forgetful to be found
Who are sent to dance *Moll*
Dixon's round.
And having tried each shop and stall
And disappointed at them all
At last some tells them of the cheat,
Then they return from the pursuit
And straight way home with shame they run
And others laugh at what is done,
But 'tis a thing to be disputed
Which is the greatest fool reputed,
The man that innocently went
Or he that him design'dly sent."

This custom of imposing upon each other on the 1st day of April, and sending one another upon frivolous, ridiculous and absurd errands, whatever be its origin, appears to be universal throughout Europe.

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In France one thus imposed upon, on the 1st of April, is called "un poisson d' Avril," in England such a person is called an "April fool," in Italy "un pesce d' Aprile" and in Scotland a "Gowk."

It is curious that the Hindoos practice precisely similar tricks on the 31st. of March, when they hold what is called the "Huli Festival."

During the "Huli festival" when mirth and festivity reign among the Hindoos of every class, one subject of diversion is to send people on errands and expeditions that are to end in disappointment and raise a laugh at the expense of the person sent.

The "Huli" is always in March and the last day is the general holiday.

Colonel Pearce in his "Asiatic Researches" proves this to have been a cus-

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114 tom, from immemorial time, among the
17 Hindoos. The least inquiry, however, into
522 the ancient customs of Persia, or the
527 minutest acquaintance with the general astronomical mythology of Asia, would have told Colonel Pearce that the boundless hilarity and jocund sports, prevalent during the "Huli Festival" in India, have their origin in the ancient practice of celebrating with festival rites the period of the vernal equinox, or the day when the New Year of Persia anciently began (*)

ASCENSION DAY
Lapsi

527 The Maltese celebrate Ascension day by parties and picnics on the water.

(*) Maurice in his "Indian Antiquities."

In the afternoon of the Feast, the great harbour and the several creeks, especially that of Calcara, present indeed a very lively appearance. Yachts, boats, and small crafts plough the deep, the greater part sailing, with flags and streamers flying in the breeze, laden with people, mostly clad in gay summer costumes, which they put on for the first time on this day as a sign of the approaching hot season.

Some of these gay parties keep on their crafts, singing and playing guitars and melodeons, whilst others disembark on some shady rock on the sea-shore, where they spread their table-cloths and sit down to enjoy the edibles which they bring with them.

A little after sunset, when the numerous and jolly picnic parties have emptied some bottles of wine, the boats

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527 are seen putting off the shore and
501 steering their course homewards.

527 The custom of making swings on
526 Ascension Day, is very common in Malta, especially among the country people. In almost every village, lots of women and children may be seen swinging together and singing merrily on the day of *Lapsi*.

527 No reason could perhaps be assigned
173 by the Maltese for the practice of celebrating *Lapsi* by parties and picnics on the water, and for making swings, except that they follow the custom of their ancestors.

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796 ***St. JOHN'S EVE***
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859 Not unlike other nations, the Maltese are not indifferent in celebrating

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the Nativity of St. John by kindling great fires in the public streets, and giving their children dolls to carry in their arms on this day, in order to make good the prophecy respecting the Baptist "*Multi in nativitatae ejus gaudebunt*".

Days and even weeks before this festival, groups of children are seen going out into the country fields to gather straw, twigs and all sorts of other combustibles which they store up for St. John's eve.

On the night of the 23rd. of June, the day before the festival of the Saint, great fires are kindled in the streets, squares, and market places of the towns and villages of the Island, and as fire after fire blazes out of the darkness of that summer night, the effect is singularly striking.

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796 These fires are sometimes kept up
372 for hours, being continually fed by the scores of by-standers who take great delight in throwing amidst the flames some old rickety piece of furniture which they consider as lumber in their houses. Lots of happy and reckless children, and very often men, are seen merrily leaping in succession over and through the crackling flames (*).

796 At the time of the Order of St.
372 John of Jerusalem, the Grand Master
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[194] (*) Leaping over the fires is mentioned among the superstitious rites used at the *Palilia* feasts, instituted in honour of *Pales* the goddess of shepherds, (in the calends of May) in Ovidius's Fasti.

" Moxque per ardentes stipulae crepitantis acervos
Traijcias celeri strenua membra pede "

The learned Moresin appears to have been of opinion that the custom of leaping over these fires is a vestige of the ordeal, where to be able to pass through fires with safety, was held to be an indication of innocence.

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himself, soon after the *Angelus* used to leave his palace, accompanied by the Grand Prior, the Bishop, and two bailiffs, to set fire to some pitch barrels which were placed for the occasion in the square facing the sacred Hospital. 796 372 175

Great crowds used to assemble here in order to assist at this ceremony. The setting ablaze of the five casks, and later on, of the 8 casks, (*), by the Grand Master, was a signal for the others to kindle their fires in the different parts of the town.

Various opinions are entertained by antiquarian writers with regard to the origin of these fires on St. John's eve. 796 372 171 174

From the account given by Jakob Grimm in his "Deutsche Mythologie" p. p. 583, 593, it would appear that

(*) Eight being the languages of the Order.

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996 the great blaze reserved for the eve
372 of the feast of the nativity of St.
171 John the Baptist on the 23rd. of
174 June, is observed with similar rites in every country of Europe.

The kindling of the fire, the leaping over or through the flames clearly show that these rites are essentially of heathen origin. They are obviously connected with the worship of the sun, and were doubtless practised long before the Baptist was born. In old heathen times the summer and winter solstices were the two greatest and most widespread festivals in Europe.

These fires—says another writer—are evidently a remnant of the ancient Beal fires of the Druids, at the *Beil* time, which was at the beginning of May. But why do they chiefly occur on the night before the festival of the

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Saint, instead of the old period of *Beil* time which was the beginning of May? —I do not believe that a satisfactory explanation of these circumstances has yet been given by any of the antiquaries. It was perhaps to transfer the practice or custom of lighting these fires from a Pagan to a Christian object.

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist was a great and solemn festival of the Church, like those of the other great festivals of Martyrs, the eve or vigil of it was, in the early ages, commemorated with appropriated ceremonies. The public devotions were kept up all night in the churches, of which the Saint was the patron, and the solemnities of the next day were ushered in amongst types and figures appropriate to the occasion. Amongst these was probably introduced a large and

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unusual exhibition of lights to typify the Baptist who, in the Gospel, is called by the Saviour himself "A burning shining Light." What could have been more natural than that the early Christian Authorities would have directed the people to light their anniversary fires on the eve of this Saint, and thus give to the national custom a Christian instead of a Pagan significance? To this feeling, most likely is due the transfer of the fires to the 23rd. of June and, perhaps too, this perpetuation to this day amongst the people.

Gebelin, in his "Allegories Orientales" accounts in the following manner for the custom of making fires on Midsummer Eve.

"Can one" says he "omit to mention here the St. John's fires, those sacred fires kindled about midnight, on the

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very moment of the solstices, by the greatest part of ancient as well as of modern nations—a religious ceremony of the most remote antiquity which was observed for the prosperity of states and people and to dispel every kind of evil? The origin of this fire which is still retained by so many nations, though enveloped in the mist of antiquity, is very simple. It was a *Feu de joie*, kindled the very moment the year began; for the first of all years, and the most ancient that we know of, began at this month of June, hence the very name of this month, *Junior* meaning the youngest, which is renewed; while that of the preceding one is May, *Major*, meaning the ancient. Thus the one was the month of young people whilst the other belonged to old men.

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These *feu de joie* were accompanied, at the same time, with vows and sacrifices for the prosperity of the people and the fruits of the earth.

They danced also round this fire, and the most active leaped over it. Each on departing took a fire brand, and the remains were scattered to the wind, which at the same time that it dispersed the ashes, was thought to expel every evil. When after a long train of years, the year ceased to commence at this solstice, the custom of making these fires, at this time, was still continued by force of habit. Besides it would have been a sad thing to have deprived the people of a day of joy in times when there were not many of them, thus the custom has been continued and handed down to us."

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Dr. Milner is of opinion that the fires lighted up all over the continent, on the eve of the 24th. of June, are not intended as the idolatrous worship of the sun or *Baal*, the Philistine God of fire, but in honour of Christ's precursor, as alluding to his character of bearing witness to the light (John i. 7) and of his being himself a bright and shining light (John V, 35).

In conclusion, it would appear as certain, that the fires of St. John's eve were intended to typify the Saint by an exhibition of light.

Formerly the feast of St. John (24th. of June) was very popular in Malta. It ranked with that of SS. Peter and Paul, celebrated at Notabile on the 29th of the same month.

The number of people that flocked to Valletta from all parts of the Island,

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796 on the morning of this day, was indeed very great.

When the procession was over, most of the country people repaired to the upper Barracca, which was then roofed over and consequently offered a very comfortable temporary asylum. Here they amused themselves till the evening eating, drinking, and singing.

St. PETER AND St. PAUL

796 529 One of the principal occasions of amusement for the Maltese is, no doubt, the popular feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, celebrated at Notabile or Città Vecchia on the 29th of June.

[192] This feast is known by the name of l' IMNARIA which is a corruption of *luminaria* (illumination) from the illumination which takes place at the

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Cathedral Church of Notabile on the eve of the said festival.

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On the morning of the feast—as soon as the procession, which is led by the Bishop, enters the Cathedral Church—large crowds, especially of country people in their substantial holiday finery, and wearing their hoarded ornaments of massive gold, drive at a racing speed to Boschetto, where, careless of the excessive heat of a broiling sun, they divide into companies and under the shades of the leafy orange trees in the beautiful garden, they seem quite happy in eating their sumptuous dinners, consisting chiefly of stewed rabbit, ham, pies, cheese and an allowance of common wine, which they keep in large dark glass bottles, or in tin cans where the indispensable liquid is less liable to being spilt.

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527 53 When the viands are fairly consumed and the wine commences to use its influence, the jolly parties amuse themselves in dancing, singing, and playing their guitars and melodeons. 527 541 These gratifications are carried on up to 3 or 4 p.m., when the picnic-makers drive back to see the races which are held on this day just below the walls of the old City, where the stout swarthy country women, to secure a good view, occupy their seats on the field walls for hours until they get nearly broiled in the blaze of a mid-summer sun.

The races commence at 6 p. m. and consist of mules, horses, and mares, which are entirely unharnessed, and the riders without any means of maintaining their position, except their legs which they fix under the animal's

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belly, while with a thong in each hand they keep urging the gaily bedecked beasts to reach the goal first. 527 541

Soon after the races the merry parties set out on their return to their dwellings at quite a racing speed. Now you see every description of vehicle vying with its neighbour, and every driver urging with whip and voice to a reckless break-neck gallop his steed, adorned with two or more rows of tinkling bells hanging round the neck. 527 492 493

Flags and variegated silk handkerchiefs are streaming from the carriages, and ribbons from the horses' heads. Every cart is crammed, as only the Maltese can cram on anything on wheels. The sun-burnt country women are laughing and pelting the by-standers with apples, and waving tall green reeds and poplar branches in their 527

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527 hands, whilst the men are either playing their favourite melodeons or singing, and from group after group the chorus of the gaily dressed young girls rises all along the roads leading to the respective villages.

543 Before leaving the description of this very popular amusement, I think it will not be amiss to say something about the famous *Imnaria* exhibition, which is held every year at Boschetto and is always thoroughly enjoyed by a very large attendance of visitors.

This agricultural show, which was instituted by Sir William Reid, Governor of Malta, in 1857, is held on the 28th and 29th of June, the eve and the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul, under the auspices of the "Società Economico-Agraria" and under the patronage of H. E. the Governor of the Island.

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When the gentlemen appointed as judges in the different sections carry out their duties, the exhibition receives the benediction of the church, and the show is then opened to the public. 543

His Excellency visits the exhibition and is received by the President and other officers of the Agricultural Society.

After making a tour round the different sections, the Governor proceeds to the stand where he at once commences the distribution of prizes to the successful exhibitors.

The show is generally a very good one — animals, fruits, grains, cereals, honey, poultry, and vegetables are exhibited. Some of the bulls and cows of Maltese and English breeds cannot but be greatly admired, being truly superb animals.

Of all the objects exhibited none

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543 perhaps excites more interest to the visitors than the beautiful animals which are considered a great ornament to the show.

Sta. VENERA

796 A similar occasion as that of *Imnaria* is afforded to the never tired merry-makers country-women, on the 4th Sunday of July, the day dedicated to the festival of St. Anne.

As early as 4 o'clock in the morning of this day, scores of carts, loaded with gaily dressed country girls, leave their respective villages and proceed to Sta. Venera, a small church at Hamrun, which is very nicely decorated for the occasion.

[539] Here a sermon on the life of the great saint is preached to the people as-

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sembled, from a wooden pulpit in the open air, near the small chapel. When the sermon is over the jolly country girls take a great delight in the fair which is held along the space in front of the small church, which is blocked up from end to end with temporary booths.

The wares offered for sale are of the simplest description, consisting principally of scapulars, pictures, gay woollen and cotton sashes and handkerchiefs, cheep trinkets, and glass and china of inferior quality; but there is enough colour and glitter to produce a pretty kaleidoscopic effect when touched by the rays of the bright shining sun.

On this morning the scores of vendors of sweetmeats, lemonade, and iced water seem endowed with extra power of throat and lungs for vociferating these refreshing compounds, and the set up

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796 [543] 438 [265] tables, piled with the castellated erections of honey and almonds, tempt those crowds of country people to spend what they have purposely put by for this annual holiday.

After three or four hours of high revel the wheeled vehicles return home with their jolly occupants singing all along the road.

Sta. MARIA

796 184 On the 15th of August, the day dedicated to the Assumption of the B. V. Mary (Santa Maria), nearly all the Island of Malta is *en fête.*

[103] Seven of the twentyfour villages, that is:— Casals Musta, Dingli, Attard, Crendi, Micabiba, Asciak and Gudia celebrate on this day their titular feast with the usual illuminations, fireworks and processions.

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This feast is also celebrated with great pomp at the Cathedral Church of città Vittoria, Gozo, and for this reason our sister Island is, on the occasion, an attraction for the Maltese people. In fact, several steamers and launches decorated with coloured flags, are employed on the eve of the festival, and sometimes for some days before, transporting the vast concourse of people who, influenced either by a spirit of devotion or a desire to enjoy a pleasant trip, a healthy change, and a little fresh air, embrace the opportunity of paying a visit to the famed Island of Calypso to behold the festivities which take place there at the festival of "Santa Maria."

On the evening of the 14th the illuminations and fireworks are very splendid; the religious ceremonies, on that,

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796 and the following day, are conducted with the usual solemnity and fervour. 541 There are also several races of quadrupeds in the afternoon of the day of the festival, similar to those which are held in Malta on the feast of S. S. Peter and Paul (L'Imnaria). These races bring the amusements to a close.

796 484 788 Worth mentioning is the custom which prevails amongst some of our country people on the 14th of August, the eve of the feast of "Santa Maria."

Groups of country men and country women, actuated purely by religious motives and a desire to honour the Great Mother of God, start for a pilgrimage of more than 8 hours walk on the morning of that summer day, heedless of the excessive heat of the scorching sun, to visit the churches at the 7 above mentioned villages dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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St. ROCCO RACES

The famous horse race which is annually run at Pietà on the 16th of August, the feast day of St. Roque, is a source of great excitement to the large crowds of people who flock thither from all parts of the Island. 527 541 [796]

Although the races do not commence before 6 p.m. yet, as early as 3 o'clock, the Pietà creek is all covered with hundreds of boats of every description, laden with people; and all along the Pietà quay, from the Bathing house — the place from which the competing animals start—to the winning post, at a little distance from "Portes des Bombes" — is always lined with thousands of spectators in order to witness the sport.

Some 5 minutes before 6 o'clock, a [202] gun is fired as a signal for the people to clear the way; a second report is

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[202]

then heard, and some 10 or 12 donkeys are seen running at full speed, driven by jockeys, amidst great shouts and roars of laughter from the spectators, caused sometimes by the stubborness of some of the long eared quadrupeds, which instead of running keep kicking right and left, not being in humour perhaps on that day of being tormented by the constant goading of their merciless rider.

The donkey race is immediately followed by the horses first, and then that of the mares.

It is really grand to see the noble creatures, darting along the race course with neither saddles or bridles, and mounted barebacked by the gaily dressed jockeys.

When the Government prizes, which consist of gay stripes of richly brocaded

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silk and lama cloth of gold, are distributed, all the crowds disperse and the victorious champions, loaded with honours and caresses, and covered with garlands of flowers and ribbons, are conducted in triumph through the streets of the town amidst the deafening cheers and acclamations of the populace.

These races were instituted in 1593 during the reign of Grand Master Verdala, as popular rejoicings after that the plague, which was introduced in Malta through the carelessness of some of the authorities, had played great havoc for eighteen months amongst the inhabitants of the Island.

From this race all the other races which are held on different occasions during the year, both in Malta and in Gozo, owe their origin.

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527 These races were first held on St.
541 Roque's Feast day in consequence of
776 the working of miraculous cures of
755 the plague by St. Roque who was
796 specially invoked by persons afflicted,
195 while stricken himself with the desease, at Piacenza, in Italy.

THE "VITTORIA"

527 ***Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary***

[796] The 8th. of September, the day dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is no doubt the grandest and the most popular day for the people of these Islands.

Both the streets and church of Senglea—the town in which the feast is celebrated—present on this occasion a most lively appearance.

[184] The grand illumination and the

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beautiful display of fireworks, on the eve of the festival, attract thousands of spectators not only from the towns and villages of Malta but also from the sister Island.

Hundreds of Gozitans flock to Malta in order, as it were, to take part in the general rejoicings held on this special day of the anniversary of the raising of the great siege of Malta, which ended in the total repulse of the Turks, after a most heroic defence by the Knights of St. John, united to the bravery of the Maltese, under the intrepid Grand Master Jean La Valette, in 1565.

In the afternoon of the feast (8th Sept.) the grand harbour presents indeed a very lively appearance, there being boat racing and the *giostra* or greasy pole, the prizes for which are given

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by Government in commemoration of the defeat of the Turks (*)

The famous annual boat race of the 8th. of September draws as great a concourse of people, comparatively speaking, as the far-famed Oxford and Cambridge contest annually does along the banks of the Thames.

The Valletta harbour quays, from the new extension, right up to the old Barriera, and all the overlooking lines of walls and batteries, on both sides of the harbour, are early taken possession of by thousands of spectators who take great delight in this exciting annual regatta.

The course is from "Ras Hanzir"

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(*) Both the regatta and the *giostra* were formerly held on the 10th of August, St. Lawrence day—The Parochial feast of Vittoriosa, the principal seat during the memorable siege of 1565.

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to the Custom house, the whole length of which is always crowded with thousands of picturesquely painted boats, yachts, and small crafts with living cargo. 529 526

The race course in the centre channel is always well kept clear by a couple of steam launches, and the Port Department gondolas.

The races consist of (1) four-oared fishing boats (2) double pair and single pair passage boats—that is boats employed for the conveyance of passengers —and (3) four-oared *cajjicchi.*

The boats used for racing, on this special day, are always very gaily painted and gilt, being also of a much lighter and sharper build than the others of the same kind, and the best stalwart men are always selected for rowing. [501]

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526 When the victory prizes are awarded, the beaten racers return crest-fallen in silence to their creeks, whilst the victors, cheered by the immense crowds of spectators, keep ploughing the deep, with the prize flags tied up at the prow end of the boat, waving in the breeze.

The boat race is immediately followed by the *Giostra* or greasy pole, which adds not a little to the amusement of the crowds assembled to witness the sports.

The *Giostra* is a large barge, anchored opposite the Custom House buildings, in the centre of the port, having a long tapering pole, placed almost horizontally from the head, with a small white and red fla fixed on at the end, and made slippery with grease, soap, and other ingredients. At a given signal a number of boys first, then lads and men,

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in their bathing costume, immediately begin the task of endeavouring to seize the flag, one after another they continue tumbling into the water and raising again to renew the attempt.

Gradually the greasy matter diminishes and the competitors are able to advance further. At last the winner with the prize flag in hand, amidst great shouts of "bravo," loud whistling, and clapping of hands announces the end of the National Feast for that day.

The 7th of September is also commemorated by a melancholy, and at the same time imposing, ceremony at the Co-Cathedral Church of St. John in Valletta.

On the morning of this day the celebrant, preceded by the Chapter and Clergy, descend into the crypt beneath the High Altar, and while chanting

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796 *requiems* for the repose of the souls of
769 the knights interred there, and all the other dead who fell in the great siege, sprinkles holy water upon the tombs, while the great bells, in the towers above, peal mournfully the legend which the Maltese voice in the words "Il-libera tal Cavalieri" (the funeral of the Knights).

527 For some years past a purely civil commemoration of the glorious Victory of the 8th of Sept. (1565) when the Cross triumphed over the Crescent, has been celebrated, however, not on the 8th of September, but on the 1st Sunday after that date in Valletta, and the Sunday after that at Vittoriosa and Cospicua, while on the following Sunday the celebration takes place at Sliema and Zabbar.

In Valletta, the St. George's Square and Str. Reale, are worth seeing on this occasion.

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Str. Reale, from Fort St. Elmo to Porta Reale, is aglow with the red and white colours of Malta and knights' flags; and at night is ablaze with thousands of variegated lights. 527 186

St. George's Square—opposite the Governor's Palace—is ornamented with splendid clusters of flags, pennons, gonfalons, shields, battle axes, spears, captured cannons and some entire suits of armour, kindly lent from the Palace collection. These suits create great interest, being the original property of the knights, some of the pieces bearing the evidence of shots and sabre cuts. 527 186 543

From the various stands, selected national bands fill the city with sweet music, and in the evening elaborate fire-works illustrate the figures and deeds of the knights. 527 [533]

In connection with this feast, horse ooo

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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In connection with this feast, horse
527 541 525 races take place at Sliema. The concourse of people and the excitement are not less, on this occasion, than they are on the St. Rocco festival, the events being always contested with great spirit, and large sums exchange hands in the bets laid upon the respective favourites.

527 The national Feast at Cospicua is celebrated on the hillside of Sta. Margherita which is, on this occasion, very tastefully decorated and illuminated with Venetian lights to the delectation of many thousands.

[541] At the Sliema celebration the fireworks are set off on barges on the water and thousands cheer the beautiful display.

At Vittoriosa—the very scene of the final victory on Sept. 8th 1565—the commemoration of this most glorious event in History is fitly celebrated.

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The square is most tastefully got up with splendid trophies of arms and red and white flags. From each of the trophies broad red and white sashes are seen hanging, on which the names of those who distinguished themselves by some brave and noble deed in the memorable siege, are written in gold letters. 527 186

The decorations of the column of Victory, in the middle of the square, are simply magnificent. This column is surrounded by four figures, representing 4 Grand Masters in full armour, one of these is the immortal La Valette, who at the head of his knights, and supported by the population of Malta—men, women, and children—succeeded in hurling back, discomfited and disgraced, the Moslem, that would from Malta have sallied forth to the conquest of Europe. 527 186 211

During the day the bands, playing 527 533

527 533 lively marches, parade the principal streets of the old town, preceded by large crowds of people with palm leaves and Maltese flags in their hands.

527 541 In the evening the enthusiasm in the beautifully illuminated square is intense and prolonged.

[533] Large crowds from all parts of the Island flock here to listen to the choice selections of music, played by the bands on the square, and to witness the grand display of fireworks.

These are indeed worth seeing, especially one set piece. This represents a real fort with the red and white cross banner of the knights at the top. This fort opens fire and is attacked by several Turkish men-of-war, with sails set and the crescent flying at the mast heads.

As these miniatures of old-fashioned

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galleys come sailing across the square, on wires stretched over the people's heads, towards the fort, they open fire in great style. One after the other they meet their fate, for the fort peppers them cruelly and finally sets them on fire, so that soon—hulls, sails, masts, yards, crescent flags, and all the warlike things about them are in few seconds wrapped in flames and destroyed. 527 541

Before leaving the description of the celebration of this National *fète* at Vittoriosa, I wish to mention that hundreds of loaves are distributed to the needy of that town on the morning of the feast. 527 735

Worth mentioning is the custom which prevails, on the 7th of Sept. among the women residing at Rabato (Notabile) and in the country surrounding it. These, to celebrate the com- 184 527 533

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184 memoration of the Victory won by the
527 Maltese in the great siege of 1565,
533 instead of coming to take part in the amusements held in Valletta and in the other towns, meet in groups on the terraces, or flat tops of their houses, and keep singing merrily till very late at night.

ANOTHER NATIONAL FEAST

527 The celebration of the glorious vic-
186 tory won by the Maltese over the Turks in 1565 has been of good use to the Maltese, It has enabled them to comprehend more keenly the historic value of this Island.

[175] In fact, some two years ago another
[618] national commemoration has originated at Città Vecchia, on the 3rd or 4th Sunday of September, to celebrate the

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liberation of the Maltese from the yoke of the Saracens by Count Roger of Normandy in the year 1090. 527 186 [175] [648]

A liberal programme is now annually arranged by the Committee embracing every kind of attraction at Notabile.

PILGRIMAGES TO MELLEHA (*) 778

On the last two Sundays of September, every year, the roads leading to Melleha are alive with merry parties, especially country people, on their way to that village, in order to visit the 788

(*) Melleha is a village some 10½ miles distant from Valletta, and about an hour's ride from St. Paul's Bay. It is renowned for the very old, perhaps the oldest, Sanctuary in the world, dedicated to the B. Virgin. This Sanctuary was founded by St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, while he was in Malta (58 A. D.) for the convenience of the faithful who lived in those neighbourhoods. Over the small altar is a picture of St. Mary, covering another old drawing of the same, executed by St. Luke. [361] [776] [532]

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778 788 Sanctuary dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

[782] [527] When the devout visitors recite their prayers in the venerated shrine of the Madonna, and leave behind their offerings, such as candles, oil to be burnt in the lamps before the image, waxen and silver limbs &c., they come out and devote the remainder of the day to amusements.

173 778 788 The annual pilgrimages to Melleha in September are supposed to have originated after the victory won by the Maltese over the Turks in 1565. The siege being raised on the 7th of Sept. —the eve of the day dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin— the Maltese, in token of gratitude for the help received from the Virgin, in those trying days, made pilgrimages to Melleha, to offer prayers before the mirac-

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ulous effigy of the B. V. Mary, venerated in that shrine excavated out of the rock.

ALL SOULS' DAY
2nd November

In Malta, the same as in any other Roman Catholic country, a feast is also celebrated for the dead, and the Cemeteries especially that of the "Addolorata," which ranks amongst the finest in Europe, are, on the 1st and 2nd of November the favourite resort of nearly the whole population of the towns and of the neighbouring villages.

Amidst mournful tingling and tolling of the church bells, countless inhabitants, mostly clad in the habiliments of grief, and murmuring prayers, are seen wending their way to the Cemetery. Arrived

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769 there they proceed to the tombs of
796 their departed dear ones.

[782] Here a widow and orphans are seen knelt in prayer at the vault of their respective husband and father, or perhaps some daughters at the resting place of their ever lost mother or father. There some father and mother contemplating the last abode of their beloved son in whom they had placed their future hopes; they are all there reverently and devoutly reciting prayers to the Almighty for the repose of the souls of their deceased.

The graves on these two days are very beautifully decorated. Some are literally covered by masses of flowers, some hung with wreaths and crosses woven of the loveliest blossoms, others converted into a temporary garden, with willows, cypress, and other shrubs.

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The custom of strewing garlands of flowers upon the graves of the departed is derived from the ancients who used to crown the deceased with flowers in token of the shortness of life. (*) It appears also from "Pliny's Natural History," from "Cicero's Oration on Lucius Plancus" and from "Virgil's sixth Æneid," that the strewing of flowers on the graves was a funeral rite among the heathens—St. Ambrose, however, in his funeral oration on the death of Valentinian, has these words: "I will not sprinkle his grave with flowers but pour on his spirit the odour of Christ. Let others pour baskets of flowers—Christ is our lily and with this will I consecrate his relics." (†)

(*) Gough, in the introduction to his second volume of Sepulchral munuments, page 5.

(†) Brand's Popular Antiquities.

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At the *Angelus*, these devout mourners, after hours spent in prayers and in going round the cypress groves, reading the beautiful epitaphs inscribed on the rich marble tombstones and the beautiful monuments, take a last glance at the tombs, as if bidding a fond and affectionate farewell to their inanimate occupants, and then return to their city or country homes, either murmuring their prayers for the repose of the souls of the faithful departed, or talking about the many magnificent mausoleums, and the beauty of floral decorations lavished on them. The nearer the crowds approach their dwelling places the more they are reminded of the sacred day, by the mournful pealing of the bells which seem to say "Remember those you have lost, for to-day is the day of the dead."

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It is also the custom in Malta to commemorate all Souls' day by distributing relief among the poor and needy. Collections are made for the purpose of purchasing bread and providing dinner for the poor in the lower quarters of the towns and populous centres.

A walk at about 11 a.m., on the 2nd of November, as far as the square in front of the Capuchins' Convent at Vittoriosa or at Floriana, or to some other place where the relief is distributed, affords not a little delight.

About a hundred poor old men and women, some of whom either half crippled or blind are to be seen struggling towards the big boiler in which the dinner is being cooked, with something in the shape of a pot in their hands, each and every one eager to get his or her share of the nicely cooked dinner.

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[735] When these poor creatures get their share, they go gladly back to some corner to eat what has been procured for them by the contributions received from the charitably disposed.

Before leaving the description of the celebration of All Souls' Day, it would be interesting also to mention another custom which prevails in the Island on the 2nd of November.

On this day most of the charnel-houses are thrown open and lighted up with scores of oil lamps and decked out with flowers, while crowds throng the vaults to visit the bones of their friends and relatives.

[792] The most crowded of these vaults, however, used to be that below the Capuchin church and Convent at Flo-

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riana. (*). Here the fleshless skeletons of the monks who died in the convent are dressed up in the robes which they wore during life, and arranged erect in niches along the wall. 796 769 [792]

St. Odilo, abbot of Cluny, in 998 instituted the "Commemoration of all the faithful departed" in all the monasteries of his Congregation, on the 1st of November, which was soon adopted by the whole western Church. The Council of Oxford in 1222, declared it a holiday of the second class, on which certain necessary and important kinds of work were allowed (†). In Malta however the 2nd of November is only a day of devotion. 175 796 769

(*) The opening of this vault for the public on All Soul's day has been stopped for some years past to prevent some accidents through overcrowding. Visitors, however, are allowed in at any time of the year by applying for permission to the Father Superior.

(†) BUTLER, "Life of Saints."

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SAINT MARTIN'S DAY

527 One of the greatest family feast-days, among the Maltese, is that of St. Martin's, which is held on the 2nd and 3rd Sunday of November.

Happiness and true enjoyment reign supreme in every household on this [593] special day. Pater and materfamilias entertain at dinner their married sons and daughters, with their respective consorts and children, besides nephews, nieces, and others allied by ties of consanguinity.

Every body enjoys his share of sweetmeats on St. Martin's day, with a due allowance of Marsala or some other sort of good Sicilian wine.

527 Children look forward with pleasure 267 to this day, being always regaled, by 857 either their parents or some other member of the family, with a small bag

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crammed to the top with hazelnuts, chestnuts, figs, sweets and other edibles, besides a nice small roll studded with hazelnut-kernels and covered all over with sesame. 527 262 857

With these bags and rolls the happy children come out walking along the streets, proud of what they were lucky to get, then they meet in groups or parties and indulge in games for the nuts.

The most favourite game for children on this occasion is what they call "ta 'l castell" which means hitting at the castle. The castle consists of three nuts put near each other, topped by a fourth. They each arrange, say two or three of these castles in rows, and keep throwing by turns—every one wins the castle or castles he succeeds hitting and demolishing. 527 524 857

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527 No reason can be assigned for the
174 origin or meaning of keeping St. Martin's feast as a day of merriment among
[171] the Maltese. The usage is persisted in without any association or tradition to account for it, but the merry making in the neighbouring island of Sicily at this time of the year, when the new wine is made use of for the first time.

527 Wine drinkers are of opinion that
262 one can judge best of the flavour of
273 wine after eating some nuts first—this perhaps is the reason why nuts are made so much use of on this merry day.

194 Moresin refers the great doings on
529 this occasion to an ancient Athenian festival observed in honour of Bacchus, on the 11th, 12th, and 13th days of the month of *Anthesterion*, corresponding with our November.

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CHRISTMAS

The Maltese are not at all wanting 796
in the religious fervour and the exhibition of hearty demonstrations of delight with which Christians welcome the anniversaries of the Nativity of our Blessed Redeemer.

This is made very apparent by the rich decorations and the illuminations which are to be seen in the churches on Christmas night.

Places of public resort and private residences are also richly decorated with floral emblems and devices on this occasion.

On the 24th December—Xmas eve— 796
most of the inhabitants, especially 574
young men, do not retire to bed at all 262
but ramble about, some parading the streets playing sweet melodies to charm the ears of the people, and others going

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796 in companies to some one of their
574 friends, at whose house they amuse them-
262 selves eating honey cakes and pancakes or fritters, and playing for nuts till the church bells ring a little before or after midnight.

At the conclusion of the service they come out again and devote the remainder of the night to amusements.

796 The approaching festival of Christmas
534 is heralded in some of the villages of
[184] Malta by the appearance of the "zakk" and "tambur" players in the streets. (*)

[237] The *zakk* or bagpipe is a wind instrument—one of the primitive instruments of sylvan music—formed of an inflated dog skin, which is held by the player under his left arm, with the legs

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[541] (*) The *Zakk* and tambourine are also in use amongst our lower classes on the days of Carnival.

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directed upwards, and having a mouth piece by which the skin is filled, and a cane flute or pipe which is played with both hands. This the country people play at this time of the year to represent the shepherds of Bethlehem. 796 534 [237]

The decking out of the *presepiu*, a crib or representation of the Nativity of the Holy Child at Bethlehem, by a group of dolls with pasteboard scenery, furnishes amusement to the Maltese, both old and young. 796 798

Several of the houses have a crib more or less artistically arranged, and the better the arrangements of the crib, the greater is the concourse of people who come to see it.

The custom of decking our churches and habitations with evergreens at Christmas has existed from the very establishment of Christianity and was 796 124 824

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796 174 824 unquestionably derived from the like practice of our Pagan ancestors.

"Trimming of Temples," says Polydore Virgil "with hangings, flowers, boughs, and garlands was taken from the heathen people, who decked their idols and houses with such array.

796 174 373 "Christmas," says Blount, "was called the feast of lights in the Western or Latin Church, from the many lights or candles that were lit at the feast, and this because Christ, the light of all lights, that true light, then came into the world. Hence the prevalent custom to have so many lights in our churches at Christmas midnight service.

796 174 262 The custom of eating pancakes or fritters and honey cakes at Christmas in Malta is supposed to owe its origin to the cakes baked in honour of *Janus*, who presided over the beginning of the New Year.

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ANCIENT AND MODERN SPORTS, USAGES, CEREMONIES &c.

OF THE

MALTESE PEOPLE

THE MAY POLE

This is one of the most amusing out- 527
door diversions which at the time of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem was kept annually on the 1st of May in the square facing the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta.

This popular amusement has been lately revived in Malta and is kept on some particular feast days.

The May Pole consists of a tall mast [526]
erected in some open place or square

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526 and different kinds of provisions are hung to a hoop fixed on the top of it.

The mast is rubbed with tallow from the bottom to about a third of its height, and on a given signal, from one of the Authorities, some young men, mostly of the lower class, run to the mast, where they form themselves into different parties, the nimblest one amongst them climbing on his comrades' shoulders who defend him from the others, and he who first reaches the flag, which waves on the top of the pinnacle, receives a money prize and carries off the provisions.

The art of mounting to the top consists in twisting successively linen or cotton bands and straw round the slippery part of the mast, so that while the foot rests on the band first knotted, the hands are employed in fixing a second and a third on which, being sus-

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pended by the hands, it is necessary to untie the first knot with the feet, in order to replace it a second time on the fourth step of this kind of ladder. The greasy part of the mast being once surmounted, the remaining part of the ascent is comparatively easy, and the adventurer, who has already overcome the greatest difficulty, is encouraged to proceed by repeated acclamations from the crowd. 527 526

When the pinnacle is reached the brave climber rests on a little seat made of ropes, and untying the provisions throws some of them amongst the people, whose eagerness to seize them always causes some laughable disputes.

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MAY DAY

175 529 824 Historians mention that there was a time in Malta, during the Government of the Knights of St. John, when it was customary on the 1st of May to deck the Grand Master's palace balcony, and the doors of those who were invested with the Grand Cross, with branches [194] of trees. It appears that this sign of a holiday, which was introduced in Malta by the families from the island of Rhodes, was a remnant of the worship of the sun, formerly adored by the Rhodians.

171 527 824 Bourne cites Polydor Virgil, as telling us that among the Italians the youth of both sexes were accustomed to go into the fields in the Calends of May, and bring thence branches of trees, singing all the way as they came, and to place them on the doors of their

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houses. This, he observes, is a relic of an ancient custom among the Heathens, who observed the last 4 days of April, and the 1st day of May in honour of the goddess *Flora* who was imagined to be the deity presiding over the fruits and flowers.

171 527 824

THE CUCCANJA

This is an entertainment which was formerly given by the Grand Master to the Maltese on Shrove Tuesday, the last day of the Carnival.

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Long beams were fixed against the guard house opposite the palace, and between each of the beams, rope-ladders were fastened, the whole being covered over with branches of trees in leaf, to which were tied, from top to bottom, live animals, baskets full of eggs, hams, sausages, and all kinds of provisions.

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This wooden edifice was crowned by a globe, made up of hoops and covered over with linen cloth, on which stood the figure of *Fame* holding a flag with the Grand Master's arms. Crowds of people assembled on the spacious square, and at a given signal commence to attack the *Cuccanja*, and the provisions became the property of those who, having seized them, were able to carry them off in safety through the crowd.

This lively proceeding was the cause of furious disturbances—the possessors of the various prizes having a rather rough time of it, before being allowed to retire with what they captured.

To the first enterprising individual who reached the figure of *Fame* was allotted some pecuniary remuneration which was well earned, considering the struggle he had gone through to attain

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his object, and on the standard being taken to be returned to the Grand Master, the cloth covered globe burst open and out came a flight of pigeons. 527 526 175

The Maltese never allowed either foreigners or soldiers to share the profits of the *cuccanja*.

This entertainment which has been suppressed since the reign of the Grand Master De Rohan (1775-1797) was a a source of great delight to the Maltese people. [656]

BOWLS

A game of bowls is a favourite pastime in Malta. 562

The players arrange themselves in sides of three or four each, and each man is usually provided with three bowls, which he marks differently for distinction.

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526 The bowling ground selected by the players is either some country lane, a smooth flat piece of turf, or a ditch.

The game consists in sending first, by one of the players, a small round wooden ball called *lozzu* or *likk* (the jack) to a distance of some 5 or 6 yards, and the aim of the players is to send their bowls, from the same place, that may lie as near as possible to the jack.

The side whose bowls are nearest the *jack* reckon one point for each bowl so placed. 11, 12, 15 &c. points make game according to mutual arrangement before hand.

In each side there are always a player or two who are reputed the best for either sending or throwing their bowls with accuracy and skill.

When two or more bowls, belonging to the players of the same side, accumu-

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late round the *jack*, one of the adversaries' side, who is left for the purpose, is called by the skip (l'imghallem), whose duty is to direct each of the men of his side, to play straight at the jack with force, and this generally succeeds in hitting and carrying away the jack from the neighbourhood of his opponents' bowls. 526

When the game is finished the losers, as a rule, stand drinks to the winning side.

PLAYING AT *MORRA*

The Maltese of the lower class, especially boatmen and coal-heavers are very fond of playing at *Morra*. 524 [565]

The *Morra* is a game that keeps the two adversaries—between whom it is played—on the alert and which creates great excitement between them.

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524 The game consists in presenting very suddenly to your adversary your right hand, keeping one, two, three, or four fingers shut, and in shouting at the same moment the number of fingers extended both by you and by your adversary.

The left hand serves to mark the the points gained.

The precipitate haste, the tensity of mind required, the rapidity of the turns, make both players cry their words in jerks, then their faces become glowing and contracted, while they speak with a guttural intonation the numbers cried: *Dui*, *erbgha*, *tlieta*, *ottu*, *ghaxra* or *collox* &c. (*)

525 Animated by this amusement, which

(*) Two, four, three, eight, ten or all—the player in this case extends the four fingers and thumb while expecting his adversary to do the same.

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carries a certain spice of gambling, the players of *Morra* congregate at some street corner or a public house and indulge in a game for small stakes which the winner generally spent in assuaging the thirst of both parties, a proceeding to which the loser as a rule made no objection.

FAIRS

Every Sunday morning there is a fair held along strada Mercanti, Valletta. The goods exposed for sale in these weekly fairs are of all descriptions, and attract large crowds, especially of country people.

Besides these Sunday fairs there is also another fair held annually at Floriana on the mornings of the feast days of St. Calcedonio, St. Giacomo, and

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443 St. Anna, which are celebrated on the 527 24th, 25th, and 26th of July. These [796] fairs, however, which were once very [178] popular, have now sunk into insignificance and most likely will before long entirely disappear.

443 Fairs have long been regularly held 171 in most parts of Europe and Asia, and they appear to have originated in the Church festivals, which were found to afford convenient opportunities for commercial transactions. The concourse of people being then so such greater than on other occasions.

USAGES

195 The ancient Maltese formerly kept 562 their wives in the strictest retirement. They held the opinion that women should never appear but twice in public,

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the day they were married and when they were buried. They were therefore always employed within doors, and never went out, except at a very early hour to church, when they were entirely covered by a long mantle. This costume came originally from Sicily, and reached from the head to the feet, the forehead and eyes alone being visible. The upper part of the mantle, covering the head, was cut in a different manner for unmarried women—these wearing it shaped round, while married women wore it pointed.

WEDDINGS

Marriages in Malta were always entirely arranged by the parents; who for the greater part consulted only their own interest, and the suitable-

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584 ness of the connection, without at all consulting the inclinations of their children.

[675] [431] [583] The articles of the contract having been settled, and the marriage portion agreed upon, the young man sent his intended bride a present consisting of a certain fish ornamented with garlands of ribband, with a ring or some costly jewel in its mouth.

The first interview was then fixed to take place in presence of the parents and their kinsfolk, best friends, and neighbours, who were regaled with sweetmeats and other refreshments.

[789] Before this meeting took place, the mothers of the two young people retired either into an arbour in the garden or some separate apartment, where they prepared a mixture of aniseed, aromatic plants, salt, and honey

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with which they rubbed the bride's lips, with the idea of rendering her affable and prudent. She was then conducted into the room where her future husband awaited her arrival, who presented her with a ring on which was engraved two hands united—the emblem of mutual faith—together with bracelets, necklaces and a gold chain —she presenting him in return with a handkerchief trimmed with lace and bows of ribbon.

This ceremony is called "il chelma" which means the engagement.

On the morning of the wedding-day the most honoured personage among the husband's relations threw a fine white veil over the bride's head—who wore a brocade or velvet dress, in which the other relations made certain rents for the purpose of affixing small golden shells.

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585 The bridal procession then proceeded to the Church for the ceremony, attended by musicians playing on different instruments, and singers who sang stanzas, in praise of the young couple. These musicians were proceeded by three men: the first bearing on his head a basin of white earth on which was placed a big cake with two figures, representing the bridegroom and the bride—the man who carried this basin wore also a scarf with a round cake hanging from it. The second [262] [431] carried a basket filled with sugar plums and candied nuts, which one of the relations distributed among such acquaintances he happened to meet. In the middle of the basket was a handkerchief folded in the form of a pyramid, and ornamented with the images of the B. Virgin, St. Joseph, and the

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Infant Jesus. The third man was constantly employed in burning perfumes. The bride and bridegroom followed, walking under a canopy of crimson velvet carried by four of the principal persons who attended the wedding. The rest of the relations and invited friends, called the *Haddara* closed the procession. 585

The arrival of the bridal procession at the church was announced by the ringing of bells. The officiating priest was then presented with a basin containing a cake, a handkerchief, and two bottles of wine—the usual fee on such occasions. When the marriage ceremony was completed, everyone returned from church in the same order as before. [202] [793] [465]

As the newly married couple wended their way to their house, the women and girls who crowded the balconies show-

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585 ered flowers upon them, also nuts and grains of wheat, and on their entering the house one of the kinsfolk threw from one of the windows or balcony a few handfuls of barley and some small coins on their heads.

The nuptial feast took place immediately afterwards; but the bride ate in a separate apartment. The repast being ended she was seated next to her husband and drank out of the same cup.

[184] [535] [465] [431] At a village wedding the company danced during the feast; each dancer throwing a piece of money to the fiddlers and each guest contributing a fowl to the repast.

[591] The bride always passed a week in her father's house, after which she was received with much pomp by her husband whose relations gave a great feast which was called il *hargia.*

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THE KUCCIJA

Among the peculiar customs which still exist in Malta, the *kuccija* may perhaps rank first.

The *kuccija* is an elaborate entertainment given by the parents on the first anniversary of their children's birth.

The company of relations and friends having assembled, the child is brought in and if it be a boy he is presented with a basket or tray containing corn, sweetmeats, coins, an inkstand, a candle, a rosary, a book, a sword, and other toys—if the baby is a girl, needles, silks and ribbands supply the place of the sword and inkstand.

The choice the baby makes on this occasion will, according to Maltese notions, give a just idea of his future disposition and the profession which he will follow. Should he choose the corn

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852 it is a sign of a liberal character—if he
[787] picks out the inkstand it points towards
828] inclination for trade or the bar—if he takes the book, the rosary or the candle the assumption is that he intends to dedicate his life to the service of the church.

[574] When the baby makes his or her selection, the guests are treated with refreshments, and they all drink the health and future prospects of the small individual in question.

FUNERALS

764 On the death of a Maltese, two or
767 three women called *Neuuieha*, hired for
[533] the occasion, and attired in long mourning cloaks, immediately entered the house of the deceased singing in a low and dismal voice, some appropriate deathsong. These women cut away

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branches of such vines as formed arbours in the courts, disturbed the furniture &c. in all the apartments, overturned the flower pots in the windows, broke some of the ornamental furniture, and carrying the fragments to a retired spot, threw them in a cauldron of boiling water, in which they mixed soot and ashes. With this liquid they stained all the doors in the house howling and sobbing most dismally whilst performing the operation. (*) The *neuuieha* then proceeded to the chamber of the deceased, already in his coffin, and surrounded by his female relations, wearing veils over

(*) The custom of mourning for the dead in shrieks and howlings is of great antiquity, and prevails almost universally among the followers of Mahomet.

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764 767 [292] their faces and black silk cloaks. (*) The room being stripped of all its furniture and hung with black cloth.

[302] The *neuuieha*, throwing themselves on their knees at the foot of the coffin, began singing the praises of the dead, and cut off handfuls of their hair which [262] they spread over the coffin. On the same [431] day, cakes and boiled wheat were distributed among all the relations, and the hair was cut off the tails of every horse at the stables belonging to the house of the deceased.

764 533 The funeral procession was always composed of the relations in mourning preceded by some boys playing the fifes or Trumpets.

[765] [822] [171] (*) The colours of the dress or habit. worn to signify grief are different in different countries. In Europe, the ordinary colour for mourning is black. *Black*, being the privation of light, is supposed to denote the privation of life.

PULLEYN *Origin & Inventions.*

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or trumpets. Before the corpse was interred, a pillow filled with orange and laurel leaves (*) was placed under the head, and a carpet spread over the tomb, which was suffered to remain some days, to show that during that time it was forbidden to walk over it.

No fire was lighted for three days in the kitchen of the deceased, and either one of the relations or some most intimate friend sent a dinner to the inhabitants of the house, which they ate cross-legged on the floor.

Women on this occasion remained forty days in the house, but men went out on the seventh day, with their faces unshaven. (†)

(*) Orange trees were regarded by the Pagans as expiatory.

(†) Mourning among the ancients was expressed by very different signs; such as by rending of garments, wearing sack cloth, laying aside crowns &c. Thus Plutarch, in his life of Cato, relates, that from the time of his leaving the city with Pompey, he neither shaved his head, nor, as usual, wore his crown or garland.

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171 Both Weddings and Funerals are in our duys celebrated in Malta in the same manner as in any other civilized part of the world.

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OMENS AND SUPERSTITIONS

ST. PAUL'S TONGUE

It was a popular belief among our ancestors that the teeth of fish, which we find embedded in some of the rocks, are St. Paul's *tongue*, which during his sermons penetrated even the solid rock. These fossils were pounded and the powder was held to possess a miraculous power in healing wounds.

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Till recently it has been known that some of our countryfolks used to carry one of these teeth about with them, sometimes mounted on silver and hung about their necks, as an amulet against the bites of venomous vipers—at one time very abundant in Malta.

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THE GAUGAU

771 794 In "M. A. Vassalli's Dictionary" we read that:

Among the silly superstitions of the Maltese there still exists that which a human being can be changed or turned into a *Gaugau.*

Many women and children, therefore, believe that those who are born on Christmas Eve, just at the very time when our Lord was born, will continue until their death to be transformed into a ghost while asleep, every year just on Christmas eve. They then go out and wander about all over the Island frighting people with their groanings. After thus performing these ghostly pranks for some hours, these transformed creatures return home towards dawn quite exhausted, and awake in the morning quite unconscious of what had taken place during their nocturnal expedition.

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This yearly punishment is thought to have been inflicted, as our Saviour does not like any one to be born at the same time He was born!!

In order to give confirmation to this strange fancy, some of our silly females affirm that they frequently go in search of their husbands and children, and from midnight till about 4 a.m. they do not find them in the bed where they left them.

Others, who are still more superstitious, add to this foolish belief by saying that a person may get rid of this annual transformation by taking a sieve and spending from 11 o'clock at night till Christmas morning at dawn counting the holes.

We are unable to explain, goes on to say Vassalli, how this superstition got into the minds of our forefathers. We

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771 794 192 only know that the word "Gaúgau" is derived from the Syrian word *hagogo* which means a ghost and most probably was introduced here by the Phoenicians.

BOGEY-MAN

776 The ancient Maltese thought, and insisted upon others believing, that the Bogey-man wanders about our streets during the winter nights.

The Bogey-man is described as a hideous animal partaking of the nature of an ox, a ram and a donkey, going about until it comes to the first house which has been unfairly possessed, in order that with its hideous cries it might frighten the inmates.

Parents and nurses are still in the habit of frightening the little ones with the Bogey-man in order to induce them to go to sleep.

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THE ROSE

When a women is about to give birth to a child she sends to one of her neighbours for the loan of a withered flower called the "Passion Flower" which is put at once into the water. As soon as the flower opens the woman is delivered of the child. 844 824

It is true that the rose opens after it has remained in the water for some time, although quite withered, but the fanaticism of some of our people is really excessive. A certain man relates that his wife was about to be confined and one of the neighbours brought her a passion flower, in the confusion, however, that prevailed at the moment, the withered flower was thrown into a drawer and they forgot all about it.

Shortly after the woman was delivered of three sons. The flower, however, was not to be seen.

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824 One of the inmates then remembered that it was left in a drawer. What was his astonishment, on opening that drawer, to find that on the stem of the withered flower were brought forth *three* branches covered with leaves!!!

THE EVIL EYE

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755 Many of our people believe in the evil eye, and are of opinion that there are individuals who possess the power of inflicting injury by merely looking on those whom they wish to harm. It is, however, believed that any one who has been influenced by the evil eye of another, must procure a piece of cloth from the dress of the person by whom he has been fascinated, burn it, and expose himself to the smoke of it and

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the effects of the evil eye will thus be removed. 754 755

Various charms are practised for counteracting the baneful influence of this cruel species of witchcraft. Some of the chief consist in spitting or making a big cross with the thumb on the belly while saying the words "tohrog il ghageb"; or sticking some brown wax—from the candles used during the Holy Week service—to the heads of the children or animals. Some again hung a sort of a sea-shell called *baħbuħa* round the necks of the little ones, or cattle, to make them impervious to its effects. A pair of horns is also used by some as a charm to avert the evil-eye.

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THE GHOST OF THE HOUSE

776 777 825 . Some of our people believe in what they call *Il Hâres*—and some of our country-folk still say that this *hâres* exists in the shape af an old black serpent which guards the house and bestows riches and good luck on the children born in that house.

It is held extremely unlucky to kill the old black serpent, as after its death great misfortunes will befall the members of the family.

GOOD LUCK

787 823 [779] Many believe in their fortune or luck (especially maidens) according to the figures formed by melted lead.

On the Feast of St. John—24th of June—some lead is melted and immediately poured into a vessel containing

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water, and according to the figure or shape it assumes when it solidifies so will be the fortune of the person who tries the experiment. If the lead becomes bright the maiden is to get a handsome young man for her husband, and lead a happy life with him; if it turns out black the husband will be ugly and the maiden may expect to lead a miserable existence. (*)

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THE BATH

On Easter Sunday as soon as the *Gloria* is sung in the Churches, mothers dip their babies into a bath, in which

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(*) A similar practice is kept up in Denmark, where young women melt lead on New Year's Eve, and after pouring it into water observed in the following morning what form it has assumed. If it resembles a pair of scissors, they will inevitably marry tailors; if a hammer their husbands will be smiths, and so on.

T. Dyer *Domestic Folklore.*

[971]

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755 [824] are thrown some flowers which were used to decorate the sepulchre on Good Friday.

This the mothers do to cure their little ones from any fright they may have taken.

751 Some mothers dip their other children in succession in the same bath when the baby is taken out, and this they do in order that their children might not inherit the fright the one from the other.

THE FOOT BATH

757 Some people say that when you bathe your feet in hot water, while under the influence of fever, or head ache, a little salt should be added to the water to [755] strengthen it. But in order that the

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salt may produce its effects it must be thrown by a married woman, not by a maiden.

IL *GHAGIUSA*

We have an old custom in Malta to make children believe that the *ghagiusa* (the oldest woman living in the parish) is killed at noon on Thursday, the middle of Lent.

Mothers, after fasting the first twenty days of lent, send their children to the door of the parish church, or of some convent to see the sexton or some friar throwing the old woman from the steeple down below.

The disappointment of the children is indeed very great when at noon, they don't see the *ghagiusa* thrown down.

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THE ITCHING OF THE EYE

787 826 [977] The itching of the eye is considered as an unlucky omen. Grose, celebrated antiquarian, who collected together so many of the superstitions prevalent in his day, says: "When the right eye itches the party affected will shortly cry."

THE ITCHING OF THE HAND

Among other omens we are told that the itching of the hands signifies that they will shortly receive money.

HOWLING OF DOGS

825 763 A superstitious opinion vulgarly prevails in Malta that the howling of a dog in a neighbourhood is the presage of death to any that are sick in it.

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The howling of the dog is ascribed by some to its keen sense of the odour of approaching dissolution. 825 763

This superstition which, while not confined to our Island, appears to have been almost as well known in ancient times as at the present day. 825 763 171

Dr. Nathaniel Home, in his "Daemonologie" page 60, says: "If dogs howl in the night near a house where somebody is sick, it is a sign of death."

Capitolinus tells us: that the dogs by their howlings presaged the death of Maximinus.

TINGLING of the EAR

It is a well known superstition among the Maltese that when the ear tingles they usually say that somebody is talking of them. A tingling of the right ear 787 826

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787 826 denotes that a friend is speaking well of one: a tingling of the left, implying the opposite.

[177] The opinion, from whence this proverbial saying is derived, is of great antiquity, being thus mentioned by Pliny: "Moreover is not this an opinion generally received that when our ears do glow and tingle some there be that in our absence do talk of us?"

MEETING OF WOMEN

846 787 777 If two women who have been confined on the same day meet before forty days, one of them will suffer some misfortune either in her own person or in that of her child.

THE MONTH OF MAY

777 May is considered as the month of accidents, and consequently many be-

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lieve that those who get married during this month will be unfortunate. 777

THE CHURCH ORGAN

Many of our country people want the organ to be played during the mass which is celebrated at their wedding, for they believe that if it is not played the couple will not live long together. To show how much some of our country men believe in this superstition, my friend, Mr. P. P. Castagna, gives the following anecdote in his "Storia ta Malta." 787 585 533

Not long ago a young man went to church at Casal Chircop to get married. On finding, however, that the organist did not turn up to play during the mass, he took off his coat threw it on the floor and went out

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787 585 533 in a rage, and he could not be persuaded to go back to his wedding before the organist could be found and the organ played for the occasion.

PAYING VISITS

273 594 576 825 If a person goes to pay a visit, for the first time, to a party and is not treated with a sort of drink called *zambur* — made of aniseed—a mouse enters the chest of drawers and gnaws all the petticoats of the mistress of the house.

SENDING TO THE OVEN

252 562 Some people think it a great shame for a woman who sends dishes to be cooked in an oven when her husband is away from the Island.

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LIGHT OMENS

If a woman wishes that either her husband or her son return from abroad, she is to light a lamp and leave it behind the entrance door. If the party expected does not return on the following morning, she is to light the lamp again on the following night and keep doing so until at last she sees her dear one entering the house. 789 373

BALSAM

Those among the Maltese who wish to have a *balsam* that possesses the property of healing all kinds of wounds, take an egg that has been laid on the 25th of March, Lady Day, hide it within a cupboard or on a shelf, in a dark place, and at the end of a year they begin to use it as a sovereign and unfailing remedy. 755

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THE ACACIA OR SPONGE-TREE

(Gazzïa)

824 Our ancestors had a strong aversion to introducing or bringing in the acacia or sponge-tree with the other flower-plants in the house.

[763] They believed that if the acacia were brought into the house the head thereof would die within twelve months.

THE NEWT

825 Our superstitiously inclined believe that when one kills a newt and leaves its tail contorting or wagging on the floor, that tail will be cursing the parents of its destroyer!

COAL-DUST AND SOOT

777 529 The throwing of coal-dust or soot instead of lime before a door on New year's day betokens gloom and bad luck.

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NEW YEAR'S SUPERSTITIONS

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A superstitious dread still attaches to some one of the family keeping absent at dinner time on New Year's day. He who doesn't dine with his family on New Year's day is expected to die at the end of that same year.

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He who eats hotch-potch soup on New year's day is to gnaw the ham bones all the rest of the year.

Those who eat cabbages on New year's day groan for a whole year.

OIL, SALT AND WINE

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The spilling of oil is considered a very unlucky omen by the Maltese. The spilling of salt or wine, however, betokens good luck.

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PARSLEY

824 763 When one plucks a stem of parsley by the roots and plants it again he may expect to lose one of his parents within the year.

THE HEN

825 763 When a hen crows it is at once destroyed as it foretells the death of some member of the family.

THE HAWKMOTH OR SPHINX

825 787 The appearance of a white hawkmoth betokens the coming home of some one who is abroad. The appearance of a black hawkmoth, however, is a harbinger of sad news.

COMETS

821 787 The appearance of a comet is a sign of an approaching evil.

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THROWING STONES IN A WELL

Our ancestors made children believe that if they threw stones in a well or into the sea they had to lift them up some day with their eyelashes.

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THIRTEEN AT TABLE

Sitting down thirteen to dinner is considered very unlucky.

The notion is that one of the thirteen will die within the next twenty four hours. The origin popularly assigned to this widespread superstition is the fact that thirteen was the number at the Last Supper, Judas being the thirteenth.

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SNEEZING

The custom of saying "Evviva" or "Sahha" to one who happens to sneeze

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827 prevails in Malta as in other parts of the world. (*)

DREAMS

787 There is also a popular superstition in Malta to give interpretation to certain dreams.

The Maltese say that to dream of

[788] (a) fish betokens good luck

(b) the sea foreshews a great trouble

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[789] (*) Carolus Sigonius in his Hist. of Italy would deduce this custom from a pestilence that happened in the time of Gregory the Great (about the year 750) that proved mortal to such as sneezed.

In Brand's "Popular Antiquities" we read that the custom of saluting a person who sneezed was accounted very ancient, even in the time of Aristotle, who in his Problems has endeavoured to account for it, but knew nothing of its origin. According to him, the first men prepossessed with the ideas concerning the head as the principal seat of the soul, carried their respect to salutation, as the most manifest and the most sensible operation of the head. Hence those several forms of compliments used on similar occasions amongst Greeks and Romans: *Long may you live, May you enjoy health.*

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(c) corn portends bitter crying through a misfortune 787 (777)

(d) lentils signifies hunger.

COMMON AILMENTS

At the present day, in spite of the "march of intellect" most of the ordinary ailments of every day life have still, what are popularly termed in folk medicine, their "charm remedies" consisting in very quaint recipes which from time immemorial, have been handed down from parent to child. 755

The following are the complaints to which more or less eccentric remedies have always been applied.

Bleeding of the nose—A curious remedy for the bleeding of the nose is to place a key on the person's back. The key is resorted to as a charm in

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755 this case on account of the coldness of the metal.

755 825 *Jaundice*—Our folk believe that the blood of a tortoise is an excellent remedy for jaundice caused by a fright. If the patient be a man he is to bleed a female tortoise in the leg and make the sign of the cross with its blood on the joints of his arms and legs—but if the patient be a woman she is to bleed a male tortoise.

Fright.—The cure of the ailments brought about in consequence of a fright is to kill a puppy, boil it, give the patient to drink the water in which it is boiled, then throw the whole boiled pup in the plate in such a way as to cause a fright to the patient.

Fever—Even for this dangerous disease our folks do not hesitate to practice their own remedies. One of these

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consists in cutting open a live rabbit and applying it with the still warm entrails on the stomach of the patient. 755 [825]

Piles—Carrying about a dried fig in one's pocket is considered a good specific for this complaint. [824]

Rheumatism—Amateurs of the healing art advised the sufferer to carry about a dried fish in his pocket as a charm for its cure. [825]

Sty—To prevent or cure this disorder it is customary for the patient to throw over his shoulders seven grains of barley in a well. [824]

The superstitiously inclined say that a sty forebodes the inheritance of some riches. [787]

Beside the omens and superstitions briefly described in the preceding pages 128

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128 there are many other items of folk-lore associated with our daily-life. Our object, however, being to give in this section only a brief sketch of that folk-lore which has, from time to time, woven itself around the affairs of our home life, we leave to others the task of exhausting the interesting subject relating to those old world notions and quaint beliefs which marked the social and domestic life of our forefathers.

THE END.

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/Information on religious processionals as part of various religious holidays will be found in category 796./